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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, June 22, 1936.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "STRAWBERRY PRESERVES IN COURT." Information from the Food and Drug Administration, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Friends, it's hard to believe, but it's true -- strawberry preserves have been haled into court. Strawberry preserves, than which there is no more innocent-appearing fruit. Here's the story, in black and white: "Court Holds Strawberry Preserves Guilty -- Judge Sustains Government's Contention Preserves Were Illegal."

That's the title of today's report from the Food and Drug Administration, the Federal Agency that protects against adulteration and mislabeling of strawberry preserves and all other food products shipped from one State to another.

When I read this title my first thought was, there must be some mistake. Surely no Judge who appreciates the rich, delectable flavor of strawberry preserves would ever pronounce them illegal. However, I've read the whole story, and I agree with the Judge. The two lots of preserves he convicted were guilty. They were flying under false colors. They didn't contain enough berries to deserve the good old name "Preserves."

When you and I make preserves, we weigh the berries, and we weigh the sugar, and use practically the same amounts of each -- sugar and berries. That's the old-fashioned rule. To my knowledge, it hasn't been improved upon. Even the best "store" preserves are made by that time-honored rule -- fruit and sugar, half and half.

The strawberry preserves described in today's report were not made by the half-and-half rule. Quoting your correspondent: "They were packed by a firm which used only about two-thirds as much fruit as household practice and good commercial practice demand. The packer contested the case, but the federal Judge sustained the Government's contention that the preserves were below standard, 'adulterated' under the law, and could not be sold legally until they were relabeled as 'imitation' preserves."

"Fruit is the costly ingredient in preserves. The fruit fixes the sales price. In the days when jellies, jams, and preserves were made at home, housekeepers used a half-and-half mixture of fruit and sugar. Because of this established custom, recognized by the manufacturers of jellies, jams, and preserves, the Government's advisory standard for strawberry preserves has been set at not less than 45 parts of fruit to 55 of sugar."



"The practice of putting less than the usual amount of fruit in preserves works a hardship in two ways," states our correspondent. "It defrauds the purchaser, and it denies the American farmer a broad and profitable market for much of his fruit. The fruit preserving industry also suffers when unethical manufacturers put on the market a compound that looks so much like the real fruit preserve that customers can't tell the difference -- before the jar is opened. Sometimes these compounds are nothing more than sugar, pectin, and acid, with a little fruit floating in it. A pure preserve is at a commercial disadvantage when it stands beside a low-priced imitation which looks enough like the real thing to fool the ordinary purchaser."

Strawberry preserves are not the only kind that have violated the law this spring. Many jars of peach and apricot products labeled as preserves have fallen below the Government's advisory standard. Sometimes, our correspondent explains, preserve manufacturers do not start with the fresh fruit itself, but with cold-packed fruit, or with canned fruit packed in water. In manufacturing their preserves they may take the weight statement on the can (which of course includes water), as the weight of the fruit itself. During the past few months, the Federal Food and Drug Administration has seized around 12,000 jars of below-standard preserves.

Now, going back to the two lots of strawberry preserves that were adulterated under the law, in that they did not contain enough fruit, and misbranded under the law, because they were not labeled as imitation products. As you may know, if a manufacturer wants to ship imitation jellies, jams, and preserves, that's not against the law, -- provided his products are properly labeled as imitation products. Here's a sample label for imitation preserves; first, in big letters, "IMITATION STRAWBERRY PRESERVES." Then, in small letters: "Prepared from 35 parts fruit to 55 parts sugar with added pectin in solution. Not concentrated." If the manufacturer has added fruit acid or artificial color to his product, he must state these facts on the label of his product.

And here's how you and I, popularly known as "ultimate consumers," benefit by this knowledge. If we'll take time to read the labels on the preserves, jellies, and jams we buy, we'll know whether we're getting the genuine pound-for-pound product or an imitation. The imitation, of course, is wholesome, or it couldn't be shipped in interstate commerce.

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